

# James Cooper and the East Church Case at Aberdeen, 1882-3: The High Church Movement Vindicated

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The Church of Scotland was not slow to recover from the Disruption of 1843, and there were signs of renewal in its life in the latter half of the century. One such was the revival of interest in forms of public worship as seen in the formation of the Church Service Society in 1865. Another was the high church movement which found expression in the Scottish Church Society formed in 1892. Whereas the aims of the Church Service Society were liturgical, the aims of the Scottish Church Society were doctrinal. Its main object was "to defend and advance Catholic doctrine as set forth in the Ancient Creeds and embodied in the Standards of the Church of Scotland".<sup>1</sup> The Society sought to uphold the fundamental truths of the faith found in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and reaffirmed in the reformed Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland. The "Catholic" doctrines of the faith were those of the early and undivided church to which the Church of Scotland adhered at the Reformation. The Society also wished to emphasise the place of the church as the guardian of the truth.<sup>2</sup> A high churchman was one who held a "high" doctrine about the church. The term "high church" as applied to the Scottish Church Society thus has reference to its concern for the place of doctrine in the church, and the importance of the church as an institution in preserving doctrine, and not to a concern for ritual or ceremonial.

The principles embodied in the programme of the Scottish Church Society can be seen in the ministries of some of those who were to become its leading members. The Secretary of the Society at its founding was the Rev. Dr James Cooper of the East Church of St Nicholas, Aberdeen, whose doctrine and practice were challenged by some of his elders in the East Church Case of 1882-3. The verdict in this case represents the vindication of the doctrinal position later to be adopted by the Scottish Church Society.

James Cooper (1846-1922) was born in Elgin and studied at the University of Aberdeen. He was ordained when he took up his first charge, St Stephen's, Broughty Ferry, in 1873 and he became the minister of the East Church, Aberdeen, in 1881. He

<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of the Scottish Church Society, III, in Scottish Church Society, *Annual Report 1892-3*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> William Milligan, in Scottish Church Society, *Annual Report 1892-3*, p. 14.

left Aberdeen in 1898 when he was appointed to the Regius Chair of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Glasgow. He was Moderator of the General Assembly in 1917. Cooper's doctrinal views were typical of the high church movement in that he wished to stand within the reformed tradition of the Church of Scotland, and in particular he looked back to the period of the Aberdeen Doctors in the seventeenth century as the "golden age" of the church.<sup>3</sup> Cooper was also greatly influenced by one of his professors at Aberdeen, the Rev. Dr William Milligan, who became the first President of the Scottish Church Society and was the "father in the faith" of many of those who became its members.<sup>4</sup> Milligan proved the basis for the Society's thinking on the doctrines of the church, the ministry, and the sacraments. His two best-known works were *The Resurrection of our Lord*, first published in 1881, and *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*, published in 1892. He emphasised the importance of Christ's priestly office and of his continuing heavenly life for the worship and witness of the church on earth. In spite of the Reformation emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers", Milligan considered that the doctrine of the priesthood of Christ had been neglected in Scotland. The emphasis had been put instead on the kingly and prophetic offices of Christ. The "kingly rights of the Redeemer" were upheld in the church over against the claims of the state, and the prophetic office was emphasised with the sermon being given the most important place in worship.<sup>5</sup> Milligan did not wish to foster sacerdotalism or to elevate unduly either the church or the ministry. Indeed, he thought that the only sure way of preventing sacerdotalism in the church was by emphasising the one priesthood of Christ in whom alone the church has a priestly calling, and in whom alone the church is able to exercise its ministry on earth.<sup>6</sup> James Cooper was typical of other members of the Scottish Church Society in closely following Milligan. Not simply one of Milligan's students, he became one of his intimate friends, and looked upon him with the devotion of a disciple.<sup>7</sup>

Cooper also shared the evangelical emphasis of many in the high church movement. The church and its system were only

<sup>3</sup> William Fulton, "The late Dr James Cooper: An Appreciation", in *The Aberdeen University Review*, Vol. X, 1922-3, p. 132; J. M. Kirkpatrick, "James Cooper, 1846-1922", in the *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 17, 1947, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> J. Cromarty Smith, in Scottish Church Society, *Annual Report*, 1922-3, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> H. L. Yancey, "The Development of the Theology of William Milligan (1821-1893)", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New College Library, Edinburgh, 1970, p. 270.

<sup>6</sup> William Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*, The Baird Lectures, 1891 (Edinburgh, 1892), pp. 246-7.

<sup>7</sup> H. J. Wotherspoon, *James Cooper: A Memoir* (London, 1926), pp. 60-1, 176.

the "pillar and ground" or those fundamental truths which he believed to be the power of God to salvation.<sup>8</sup> Neither was his orthodoxy cold and formal. There are several references in the diaries of his student days to the need for his life being centred in Christ as the living Lord, and not as a mere historical person.<sup>9</sup> A striking example of the way in which Cooper held the church in subordination is an incident during his Aberdeen ministry. He had heard about a woman member of his congregation who had decided to become a missionary with the Plymouth Brethren. A friend, who met him on his way to see the woman, said that Cooper was going to remonstrate with her, and "seemed to be bent on overwhelming her with arguments about the Church." But on returning from seeing the woman Cooper said:

"I did not say one word of what I intended. She seemed to me to be clearly acting under a Divine Call. So I could say nothing."<sup>10</sup>

While he shared in the main doctrinal position of the high church movement, James Cooper gave it his own distinctive emphasis. For Cooper the unity of the church was of the greatest importance, and he wished, above all, to promote the reunion of the Church of Scotland and the Church of England. More than any other member of the Scottish Church Society Cooper looked to the Church of England for inspiration. Others in the Society, such as George W. Sprott and Thomas Leishman, and Cooper's biographer, H. J. Wotherspoon, were careful to differentiate their position from any tendency towards Anglicanism, and made their appeal to the Presbyterianism of the past. Cooper, on the other hand, explicitly advocated the reconciliation of the two national churches and a "United Church for the British Empire."<sup>11</sup> Yet Wotherspoon did not think that Cooper was inclined to Anglicise:

"he approved the Church of England because in so much it agreed with himself, and because alliance with it was necessary to his life-long dream of a restored *Ecclesia Scoticana*."<sup>12</sup>

Cooper was influenced by the traditional Episcopalianism of his native Morayshire, and his contacts in the Church of England were extensive. He was invited on several occasions to lecture

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Diaries of James Cooper, 13th December 1867, Aberdeen University Library, MS. 2283/1, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 184.

<sup>11</sup> James Cooper, *A United Church for the British Empire*, A sermon preached in the Parish Church of St Lawrence, Forres, 2nd March 1902 (Forres, 1902).

<sup>12</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 163.

to Anglican clergymen, and during his year as Moderator he lectured on church unity in London at King's College and at St Paul's.<sup>13</sup> He received honorary degrees from the universities of Dublin, Durham, and Oxford.<sup>14</sup>

Cooper was also influenced by the Oxford Movement and held a great regard for Pusey. He welcomed the similarities which he found between the language of the Tractarians and that of the reformed Standards of the Church of Scotland. He, too, was concerned to revive the place of the doctrines of the church and the sacraments in the life of the church. Cooper could use the same expressions as the Tractarians, but the doctrines to which they referred were fundamentally different.

Cooper's churchmanship was coloured also by his own personality and interests. He was a romantic, an admirer of Sir Walter Scott,<sup>15</sup> and was interested in the Middle Ages. He was passionately interested, too, in church architecture and antiquities, and founded the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society in 1886, the first of such societies to be formed in Scotland.<sup>16</sup> In politics he was a Tory and was reported as saying that he abhorred Liberalism in all its forms, and while it would be too much to say that a Tory was in every case a Christian, he evidently could have good hope of such a man.<sup>17</sup> To come across Cooper in the Church of Scotland, it was said, was like

“coming upon an old-fashioned cathedral, with its air of calm grandeur and mellowed beauty, in the midst of the staring red-brick buildings of a brand new manufacturing town.”<sup>18</sup>

Because of his distinctive emphasis and his personal characteristics, Cooper was not representative of the main stream of high churchmanship in Scotland. Yet he became the best known public spokesman of the Society and the leading exponent of its principles in the General Assembly. He was noted for the unswerving faith and courage with which he defended his position.<sup>19</sup> And when his high churchmanship was challenged in the East Church Case at Aberdeen it was his

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 294, 295-6. The London addresses were published as *Reunion: A Voice from Scotland* (London, 1918).

<sup>14</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, pp. 256, 257, 322.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 155, 196; James Cooper, *The Revival of Church Principles in the Church of Scotland*, a paper read at a meeting of the North Test Valley Clerical Society (Oxford, 1895), p. 15; *The Church and the Poets*, a sermon preached in the Parish Church of Jedburgh, 20th September 1903 (Glasgow, 1903), pp. 10-12.

<sup>16</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> J. F. Leishman, *Linton Leaves*, including a biography of Dr Thomas Leishman and some sidelights on Catholic Reunion (Edinburgh, 1937), p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



doctrinal views which were attacked, and he defended them by appeal to the reformed Standards of the Church of Scotland.

St Stephen's was a chapel-of-ease when he became its minister, and had no long tradition to hamper him, whereas the East Church was one of the oldest parish churches in Aberdeen. Cooper was to find little difficulty exercising a ministry based upon high church principles at Broughty Ferry compared with the trials he met at Aberdeen. As Wotherspoon remarked, Cooper's position at St Stephen's did not teach him the wisdom of regard for custom and usage.<sup>20</sup> Cooper's first ministry exhibits the same features as his later ministry at Aberdeen. Services were based upon the Christian Year. Christmas services were held from 1874, and Holy Week services from 1878, Cooper being the first Church of Scotland minister to hold such services in the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> He also administered communion to the sick in their homes, and he introduced the saying of the Lord's Prayer and of the Creed into the worship of the Sunday School.<sup>22</sup> The frequency of the celebration of the Lord's Supper was increased from twice-yearly to quarterly in 1874.<sup>23</sup> From the diaries he kept during this period it is evident that he placed great importance on preaching.<sup>24</sup> On St Stephen's being admitted to full parochial status in 1875, the Moderator of the Presbytery, the Rev. Dr D. B. Cameron of Rosebank Church, said that Cooper had avoided everything "that might be thought contrary to the genius of Presbyterianism", and had improved the service in St Stephen's by the exercise of "good sense and refined taste."<sup>25</sup> Cooper may have thought that such would be the general opinion, but it was the underlying criticism of his ministry at Aberdeen that it was contrary to the genius of Presbyterianism.

Cooper was called to be the minister of the East Church, Aberdeen, in 1881. A deputation had come to hear him at Broughty Ferry. Cooper said that the deputation saw all his "Ritualism" in an accentuated form, but that "they *liked* it rather than otherwise."<sup>26</sup> Cooper described the East Church of St Nicholas as one of the most important churches in the town, composed of people of all classes and the parish containing some of the worst parts of the city.<sup>27</sup> The church building was in the

<sup>20</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9; Diaries of James Cooper, 6th April 1873, MS 2283/3, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 97; Diaries of James Cooper, 8th February 1874, MS 2283/4, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Diaries of James Cooper, 21st September 1873, MS 2283/4, p. 14, and 19th April 1874, MS 2283/4, p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

eastern part of the old parish church of St Nicholas, and St Mary's Chapel, which Cooper used for daily services, was in the crypt. Cooper's ministry at Aberdeen proceeded along the same lines as at Broughty Ferry. He had some reason to expect that his ministry would be well received since his "Ritualism" was well known, and he had also made clear before he had accepted the call that he would wish to introduce the quarterly celebration of communion, and to take an active interest in the teaching of the church's Sabbath Schools. He had gone to Aberdeen anxious to put into practice the kind of ministry which he believed was needful for the well-being of the church, and Aberdeen, because of its traditions and history, seemed to offer "the most favourable ground for these experiments." Cooper was to find, however, that the tradition of the Aberdeen Doctors was in need of revival. His ministry was interrupted in May 1882 by a petition sent by eleven of his twenty-seven elders to the Presbytery of Aberdeen complaining of his "High Church" doctrine and practices. For the following ten months Cooper's attention and energy were taken up with the charges and the defence of his doctrine.

The petition of the eleven elders came as a complete surprise to Cooper, although there had been intimations of discontent in the congregation in the correspondence columns of the *Aberdeen Daily Free Press*.<sup>28</sup> Cooper considered that there had been interference in the affairs of the East Church, that much of the agitation had been framed from without, and that most of his people were loyal.<sup>29</sup> "It seems", said Cooper, "that for six months an agent of the — Society had been down here watching me, that he has been closeted with a very vindictive man . . . and that the accusation has been long in preparation, though it came on me entirely unexpectedly."<sup>30</sup> It may be reasonably assumed that the Society in question was connected with the prominent anti-Romanist, the Rev. Jacob Primmer of Townhill Church, Dunfermline.<sup>31</sup> At any rate, Cooper had not acted as cautiously as he had thought.

According to the petition, Cooper's high churchmanship had turned out to be something "altogether different" from what had been originally understood.<sup>32</sup> There were three main areas of

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Free Press*, Aberdeen, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 26th, 28th, 29th, 30th December 1881.

<sup>29</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 127.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Cooper was later to complain unsuccessfully to the Presbytery of Dunfermline in 1901 against what he termed Primmer's "campaign of defamation" against him (*The Dunfermline Free Press*, 9th November 1901; J. Boyd Primmer, *Life of Pastor Jacob Primmer*, Minister of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1916), pp. 234-6).

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 2nd May 1882 (Scottish Record Office, CH2/1/22, 23).

criticism. He was accused firstly of assimilating the worship of the church to the practices of the Anglican Church. A Litany had been used at a children's service at which Cooper was said to have intoned the ministerial part "like an English clergyman", and the children to have sung the responses "like an Episcopal congregation". The elders also said that he had celebrated communion in private with sick people, laid an undue emphasis in worship on the festivals of the Christian Year, and held daily prayer meetings in church where he prayed kneeling at a desk facing "towards the East". The elders complained secondly that Cooper had not consulted the Kirk Session over the introduction of a Litany into the worship of the Sabbath Schools. The third cause for complaint was Cooper's doctrine, and in particular his "novel and alien" preaching and practice in relation to the sacraments and public worship.

The Presbytery appointed a committee, with William Milligan as the convener, to examine the complaints. Although Milligan was privately of the opinion that the Presbytery could not be trusted to reach a fair judgment,<sup>33</sup> the committee found no reason to comment upon Cooper's practices. Cooper agreed in future to intimate his intention of administering communion to the sick in their homes either to the Session or to the congregation,<sup>34</sup> and to consult the Session on any changes in the form of worship in the Sabbath Schools. Milligan thought that Cooper had tried to achieve too much by the changes he had made in the Sabbath Schools.<sup>35</sup> The committee concluded that Cooper should be more cautious in framing his teaching so as not to be too easily misunderstood.<sup>36</sup>

The case was not settled, however, and the elders drew up a further "Minute" in which they complained that their dissatisfaction had not been dealt with fully. The case went this time to the Synod, who instructed the Presbytery to re-open the whole matter since the elders had not been cited in support of their original petition.<sup>37</sup> During this phase of the case one of the elders referred to Cooper's sacerdotalism, his view that ministers received special gifts at ordination, and the elder attributed his ideas to those of Pusey:

"There had been a priestly assumption of power, and indeed the ideas which had of late been taught among

<sup>33</sup> William Milligan to G. W. Sprott, 18th May 1882 (Church Service Society Papers).

<sup>34</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 4th July 1882.

<sup>35</sup> William Milligan to G. W. Sprott, 15th February 1882 (Church Service Society Papers).

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 4th July 1882.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the Synod of Aberdeen, 10th October 1882 (Christ's College, Aberdeen); *Aberdeen Journal*, 11th October 1882.

them had been strongly brought before their minds by the death of the late Dr Pusey. The same ideas which actuated the Puseyite party seemed to be those which were inculcated, viz: baptismal regeneration, the superiority of ordination, and the gift with it, and the change of the elements at the Communion.<sup>38</sup>

The elders were obviously not satisfied and, for the sake of better relations in the East Church, the case should be seen to have been explored fully. The case then entered on its final phase.

In this final phase the two issues lying at the root of the troubled relations between the minister and the elders were discussed: the running of the Sabbath Schools and the objections to Cooper's doctrinal views. It was only when Cooper had dealt with these matters that the case came to an end. There does not appear to have been any other reason for the opposition to Cooper's ministry. A recent study of the Disruption period in Aberdeen has pointed out differences of social class between those elders who remained in the Church of Scotland and those who left to form the Free Church congregations.<sup>39</sup> The elders of the East Church, however, proved to be an exception in that many elders of the new and dynamic middle class did not secede as was the case in most other Kirk Sessions.<sup>40</sup> There were no significant social differences, as evidenced by their occupations, between the eleven petitioning elders in the East Church Case and the other elders. The majority of the eleven elders, however, had become elders only four years previously to the case, and of those three were later to resign. Most of the more senior elders remained loyal to Cooper.<sup>41</sup>

When they appeared before the Presbytery for the final time, the eleven elders complained that the changes which Cooper had made in his manner of conducting worship in the Sabbath Schools were only "in name". Cooper had withdrawn the service book to which they had objected, but he had continued to conduct the service in the same way.<sup>42</sup> Cooper had said that he had not, at first, realised that the Session would expect to be consulted about the Schools, but having appreciated their feelings, he wished to lay his plans before them and to consult them.<sup>43</sup> Cooper said that, since the first complaints were made, he had given the elders "a very considerable share" in the practical

<sup>38</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 27th September 1882.

<sup>39</sup> A. A. MacLaren, *Religion and Social Class*, The Disruption Years in Aberdeen (London, 1974).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-91.

<sup>41</sup> The composition of the Session of the East Church in 1882 is given in the Appendix.

<sup>42</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 19th December 1882.



management of the Schools.<sup>44</sup> He had held an informal conference of elders in October 1882,<sup>45</sup> and had sent a circular letter to the members of the Session in which he said that he would "seek the things that make for peace".<sup>46</sup> Despite this the eleven elders were still not satisfied and they tried to obtain the Session's support for a separate Sabbath School, which Cooper and the Session could not recognise.<sup>47</sup> In his final reply to the Presbytery, Cooper said that he had conceded enough with regard to the Schools "to satisfy every reasonable demand".<sup>48</sup> The Presbytery's final finding was that Cooper's undertaking to consult the Session should receive a fair trial in the hope that it would prove to be permanently satisfactory.<sup>49</sup> William Milligan thought that there was no doubt that the minister alone was responsible for the Sabbath Schools, and that the Session had no authority in the matter.<sup>50</sup> There were no further complaints about the running of the Schools during the remainder of Cooper's ministry, but a "schismatic" School was opened shortly after the case was settled.<sup>51</sup>

It was only after Cooper dealt with the objections to his doctrine that the case came to an end. Cooper at first refused to enter into the theological questions, saying that such charges should take the form of a libel.<sup>52</sup> He was technically correct in insisting upon a libel for doctrinal matters, but the elders thought his refusal only intensified the feelings of dissatisfaction.<sup>53</sup> Cooper, however, agreed to defend his views, even although the Assembly had upheld an appeal against a Presbytery for examining a minister without a libel.<sup>54</sup> Cooper asked Dr G. W. Sprott to help him prepare his defence.<sup>55</sup> He also called to see Professor Milligan and Professor Samuel Trail of the Chair of Systematic

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883.

<sup>45</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 19th October and 20th October 1882.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 19th December 1882.

<sup>47</sup> Minutes of the Kirk Session of East St Nicholas, 22nd October and 4th December 1882 (Scottish Record Office CH2/741/4).

<sup>48</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 13th February 1883.

<sup>50</sup> William Milligan to G. W. Sprott, 27th October 1882 (Church Service Society Papers).

<sup>51</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 134; Diaries of James Cooper, 15th April 1883, MS 2283/5, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 19th December 1882.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3rd January 1883.

<sup>54</sup> Diaries of James Cooper, 16th January 1883, MS 2283/5, p. 6. *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, 29th May 1818, pp. 45-6. The Assembly upheld the appeal of the Rev. James Russell of Gairloch against the Presbytery of Lochcarron for hearing a petition against him from certain parishioners. The action of the Presbytery was dismissed as irregular and incompetent.

<sup>55</sup> Diaries of James Cooper, 9th January 1883, MS 2283/5, p. 3, and 16th January 1883, MS 2283/5, p. 6.

Theology in Aberdeen,<sup>56</sup> and some of his loyal elders,<sup>57</sup> before he appeared before the Presbytery. The objections to his doctrine can be grouped under five headings.

The general complaint about Cooper's doctrine was that it was inconsistent with the Standards of the Church of Scotland and was an expression of his individual views, and not of the traditions and habits of his people.<sup>58</sup> In this complaint Cooper saw a misconception which he thought went far to explain the dissatisfaction of the eleven elders. He replied:

“A minister's duty, I take it, is not to ‘flatter the views and habits of thought of his parishioners,’ but to preach the truth.”<sup>59</sup>

The Church of Scotland, he said, was not one of a number of clubs among which a man is free to choose according to his idiosyncrasies. It is, rather, “the National Branch of Christ's Holy Catholic Church”. With regard to traditions which were contrary to the Standards of the church, and which made void the “very Word of God” itself, it was the duty of a Christian minister to remove them, “and to win his people, with all wisdom and persuasiveness, to better ways.”<sup>60</sup> Cooper, however, had yet to show that his doctrinal views were those of the church's Standards.

The elders complained that Cooper held that ministers are

“ordained in direct and continuous succession from the Apostles, and as having received in virtue of their ordination a special grace and special gifts from the Spirit, and as being only thereby fitted to dispense the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or to preach the Word of God with authority or success.”<sup>61</sup>

They cited examples of his teaching on this subject. He had told the Sabbath School that ministers receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit at ordination which enable them to edify and build up the church. And he had told the Kirk Session that if he did not

<sup>56</sup> Diaries of James Cooper, 1st February and 2nd February 1883. MS 2283/5, p. 11. Cooper had been taught by Professor Trail at Aberdeen and had discovered that Trail held high church principles (Wotherpoon, *James Cooper*, pp. 60, 77, 114).

<sup>57</sup> Cooper dined with Mr Duguid (Diaries of James Cooper, 19th January 1883, MS 2283/5, p. 7), and later called on him and on Mr Cochran (Diaries of James Cooper, 1st February 1883, MS 2283/5, p. 11). At the death in 1912 of another elder, Mr George Carmichael, Cooper referred to the faithful support which he had received from him during the “fiery trial” of the East Church Case (Diaries of James Cooper, 16th October 1912, MS 2283/34, p. 83).

<sup>58</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 3rd January 1883.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 3rd January 1883.

believe himself and other ministers to have this succession he would not remain in the Church of Scotland. In reply Cooper said that the elders had accurately represented his views, although it was not a subject on which he had preached. Other Presbyterian ministers also believed firmly in the apostolic descent of their orders, and such a view was found in the church's Standards.<sup>62</sup> He denied teaching the Sabbath School that only those who were ordained could edify or build up the church. He stated:

"I have neither said, nor held, that such operations of the Spirit are confined to an ordained ministry. Such a notion would, if one held it, forbid probationers to preach, and laymen to pray, or to teach religion whether in day schools or Sunday Schools, or even to write religious books."<sup>63</sup>

The elders alleged that Cooper taught that the Lord's Supper was not merely a commemoration of Christ's death but was a sacrifice. He had said that

"The outward elements, after being duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, are not in substance and nature truly and only bread and wine as they were before, and that the sacrament is effectual by virtue of its administration only by himself or other ordained clergyman."<sup>64</sup>

They quoted statements by Cooper in which he represented the elements as a sacrifice. He was reported to have said: "I am the spokesman for you, and in your name I offer the sacrifice." In a prayer he had used these words regarding the elements: "We offer Thee our Lamb of Sacrifice in righteousness." In a sermon he had said that the eucharist was a sacrifice and that the congregation were the "sacrificing priests".<sup>65</sup>

Cooper replied by first of all affirming that he did not hold the view of the Lord's Supper that the elders seemed to hold, that it is merely a commemoration of Christ's death. He held to the *Shorter Catechism* which taught that in the sacraments Christ and the benefits of the covenant of grace are "represented,

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883. Cooper quoted from the *Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government*, "Concerning the Doctrinal Part of Ordination of Ministers", I, which states that "no man ought to take upon him the office of a minister of the Word without lawful calling." He also quoted from George Hill, *A View of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland*, which says that the function of preaching and of administration of the sacraments was "conveyed by the Apostles to all whom they ordained" (Third Edition (Edinburgh, 1835), p. 19). Ministers are thus the "successors of the Apostles, invested with all the powers which, of right, belong to any ministers of the Church of Christ" (*ibid.*, p. 32).

<sup>63</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 3rd January 1883.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 3rd January 1883.

sealed, and applied to believers".<sup>66</sup> Cooper denied that he had said that in the eucharist he offered a sacrifice. What he had often said was quite different: "I shall now, as the appointed spokesman of our common priesthood, make the commanded remembrance of Him."<sup>67</sup> The other quotation from a prayer was also inaccurate. He had used words of "somewhat similar import" in prayer, but in such a connection as showed that he employed them in no dangerous or Popish sense.<sup>68</sup> He had taught that the eucharist, like all Christian worship, has a sacrificial aspect, it being one chief part of our "sacrifice of praise". But, he said,

"I have certainly never represented it as being (what I suppose the Petitioners mean to charge me with) an *expiatory* sacrifice, nor have I spoken as if in it the sacrifice of Calvary were repeated, or said anything in any way to derogate (God forbid!) from the perfection of the one sacrifice and oblation once for all offered on the Cross."<sup>69</sup>

The slaying of the offering is past, and the Christian altar is one whereof we are to eat. He had never taught a change in the *substance* of the elements, but had tried to speak of the mystery of the Spirit's operation "whereby the elements, still remaining bread and wine, are made the channels of a real communication." Cooper quoted from Calvin<sup>70</sup> as to the mystery of our feeding on Christ in the sacrament. He had taught against both the Lutheran and Roman Catholic errors concerning the presence of Christ in the sacrament. Finally, Cooper dealt with the references to one of his sermons. The object of this sermon, he said, was to teach the priesthood of all believers, and the obligation thereby laid upon them to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. He had said that the eucharist was a sacrifice of praise, in which we lay hold of Jesus and plead his sacrifice.<sup>71</sup>

The elders complained that Cooper thought that baptism was, except in extraordinary cases, indispensable to salvation. Cooper, they said, held that a child was, at the moment of baptism, "actually regenerated and renewed" by the Holy Spirit. An example of the language used by Cooper about baptism was the

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q.92.

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883.

<sup>68</sup> In the order of service which Cooper used for Communion at Aberdeen there is the following prayer: "give us grace to draw near with a pure heart in full assurance of faith, and to offer unto Thee a sacrifice in righteousness" (James Cooper, *The Divine Liturgy*, the order at the holy table, East Church of St Nicholas, Aberdeen (Aberdeen, 1892), p. 3); cf H. J. Wotherspoon, *The Divine Service*, A Eucharistic Office, according to forms of the primitive church (Glasgow, 1893), p. 24).

<sup>69</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.17.32.

<sup>71</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883.



following sentence: "May the spark which this day has been enkindled in this child's bosom be kept alive."<sup>72</sup> Cooper admitted that he held that baptism was indispensable to salvation except in extraordinary circumstances, but he spoke "solely of those to whom, in the providence of God, the Gospel with its privileges is actually offered, and who are therefore bound to receive them."<sup>73</sup> God is, of course, free to give his grace to persons unbaptised. "What I have maintained", said Cooper, "is that we are not at liberty to dispense with an ordinance which He has instituted, and that it is (as our Confession says) 'a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance'."<sup>74</sup> Cooper held that his teaching on baptism was found in the Standards of the church. The *Westminster Confession* states that the grace of baptism, which includes regeneration, is not only promised but really "exhibited and conferred" by the Holy Ghost. It also teaches, however, that all who are baptised are "not undoubtedly regenerated".<sup>75</sup> A baptised infant may, as it states in the post baptismal prayer in *Knox's Liturgy*, "fall into such unkindness whereby he should lose the force of baptism".<sup>76</sup>

The elders complained about Cooper's practice of pronouncing a form of absolution after the prayer of confession at the Lord's Supper. They quoted him as saying:

"If any of you feel that you are sinners, yet earnestly desire forgiveness, I, the unworthy priest of God, do now forgive you your sins."<sup>77</sup>

Cooper said that any absolution which he gave to his people was ministerial and declared the absolution which is already theirs in Christ. He said:

"I have always avoided most carefully any form of absolution which I thought likely to defeat its object of comforting the penitent, or which would lead any honest hearer to suppose that in proclaiming the Gospel of forgiveness my part was other than ministerial."<sup>78</sup>

On the question of an absolution after the prayer of confession at the Lord's Supper, Cooper quoted as an authority *The Practice*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 3rd January 1883.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883. *Westminster Confession*, XXVIII, 5.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883. *Westminster Confession*, XXVIII, 5, 6.

<sup>76</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883. G. W. Sprott, ed., *The Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland, commonly known as John Knox's Liturgy* (Edinburgh, 1868), p. 149.

<sup>77</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 3rd January 1883.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883.

of the Lord's Supper as used in Berwick by John Knox.<sup>79</sup> The elders also accused Cooper of teaching a substantial change in the state of the soul after death and prior to the resurrection.<sup>80</sup> Cooper said that they had completely misunderstood him, for he had intended to teach the very opposite. He had taught that there is a "making perfect" but there is no passing from one side to the other of a soul out of Christ or into Christ.<sup>81</sup>

Having answered the objections to his doctrine in detail, and having attempted to show that it was in accordance with the church's Standards, Cooper concluded his final statement to the Presbytery by regretting the differences which had inflicted much pain on all concerned. But, he said, "that so far from having forfeited the love and sympathy of my flock, I receive almost in every house new tokens of their affection and their confidence"; and that, so far from the congregation "going to pieces", the church is as full every Sunday, and the Communion Roll is "as large as ever".<sup>82</sup>

Cooper thought that his final statement was "remarkably well received" by the Presbytery, so much so that the Rev. Dr George Jamieson of St Machar's, who had prepared a "violent Puritan speech and motion", suppressed both.<sup>83</sup> Jamieson thought that Cooper's statement had put him in a stronger position than before.<sup>84</sup> The Presbytery thus came to a moderating decision and did not proceed to a libel on the doctrinal issues. A motion was proposed by the Rev. Dr C. C. Macdonald of St Clement's, whose supporting speech satisfied Cooper, that Cooper had not been careful enough in his public teaching to show that it was in accordance with the doctrine of the church, and that he should be enjoined to use greater care in the expression of his doctrinal views.<sup>85</sup> Macdonald said that he had seldom listened to a statement which was so "eminently satisfactory" as that of Cooper's.

<sup>79</sup> "The Practice of the Lord's Supper as used in Berwick by John Knox, 1550", in Peter Lorimer, *John Knox and the Church of England* (London, 1875), p. 291: "Some notable place of the Evangell wherein God's mercie is most evidently declared shuld then be rede, planely to assure the penitent of full remission of all offencyes; and thereafter ought the minester openlye to prononce to suche as unfaynydlye repent and belyve in Jesus Christ, to be absolvyd from all dampnacion, and to stand in the favor of God."

<sup>80</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 3rd January 1883.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 6th February 1883.

<sup>83</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 136. Jamieson was later to publish a pamphlet criticising the Scottish Church Society and to propose that the Presbytery of Aberdeen overture the Assembly about the Society (George Jamieson, *Neo-Catholicism in the Church of Scotland*, A word for Protestantism as affected by The Scottish Church Society (Aberdeen, 1893)).

<sup>84</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 14th February 1883.

<sup>85</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 6th February 1883; *Aberdeen Journal*, 7th February 1883.

An amendment to this motion, proposed by George Jamieson, accused Cooper of a leaning towards sacerdotalism in his view of the ministry, and of an undue attachment to the ceremonials of the Christian faith.<sup>86</sup> This was defeated by thirteen votes to eleven by another amendment which then became the finding of the Presbytery by sixteen votes to nine over against C. C. Macdonald's original motion. This second amendment stated that the Presbytery,

“recognising that the Elders had colourable ground for complaining, enjoin Mr Cooper to be careful, in discharging his ministry, not to give occasion for the suspicion that his opinion and practices are not in thorough accordance with the doctrine of the Church of Scotland.”<sup>87</sup>

The Presbytery thus reached its final decision and both parties, Cooper and the eleven elders, acquiesced.

The final decision in the case represented a compromise to bring an end to the proceedings without a lengthy examination of Cooper's doctrinal statement. Cooper commented that the Presbytery had not contradicted his statement but had virtually censured him “in the teeth of the evidence”.<sup>88</sup> H. J. Wotherspoon observed:

“The deliverance amounted no doubt to a censure; but it was a censure, not of Cooper' doctrine or practice, but of his manner of propounding his doctrine and of introducing his practice. The severity of the censure implied would depend on the sense given to the word ‘colourable,’ which does not usually convey the idea of substantial ground for allegation of grievance.”<sup>89</sup>

Cooper had been able to show that his doctrine was in the tradition of the Church of Scotland and “he had recalled the Church's attention to aspects of its teaching which were in danger of passing from recollection; he had elicited emphatic repudiation of Zwinglianism; he had vindicated a place for his school of thought within the Church's ambit.”<sup>90</sup> Cooper's fear of further action on the part of the elders was not over; they might proceed to the Synod and to the General Assembly.<sup>91</sup> The elders, however, did not proceed any further with the case. In the course

<sup>86</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Aberdeen, 13th February 1883.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 13th February 1883.

<sup>88</sup> Diaries of James Cooper, 13th February 1883, MS 2283/5, p. 15.

<sup>89</sup> Wotherspoon, *James Cooper*, p. 133.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

of the following thirteen months five of the eleven elders resigned from the Kirk Session.<sup>92</sup>

The outcome was of the greatest significance for the high church movement in the Church of Scotland. As the *Aberdeen Journal* pointed out, it was the views of the elders, rather than those of Cooper, which were shown to be at variance with the church's Standards.<sup>93</sup> The case was thus a test of the orthodoxy of the principles later to be embodied in the constitution of the Scottish Church Society. Its significance was pointed out much later by *The Glasgow Herald* when it was commenting upon the Barnhill Case in 1901, a case which involved the Rev. T. N. Adamson, Cooper's first assistant in Aberdeen. The task of opposing ritualism, it said, was a difficult undertaking. The opponent of ritualism will be shown that they are the heretics and that the ritualists are the orthodox:

"One is surprised that there should be any doubt about this fact. It was very clearly established a good many years ago when Professor Cooper's orthodoxy was assailed according to ecclesiastical process. No one who enters the controversy should be unaware that his assailants were, by a hard-shell presbyterian presbytery, convicted of arrant Zwinglianism, while Professor Cooper's strict adherence to the doctrine laid down in the Confession of Faith was triumphantly vindicated."<sup>94</sup>

Cooper had not been patient enough in the exposition of his views, and it had not been difficult for the elders to misinterpret them. The East Church Case, while being a vindication of the principles of the high church movement as part of the tradition of the Church of Scotland, also represents a foreshadowing of the difficulties and misunderstandings which were to surround the formation of the Scottish Church Society.

<sup>92</sup> J. R. Smith and John Edwards resigned on the 5th March 1883; John Ross and John Ingram resigned from the Session and also left the congregation on the 5th November 1883; and James Meston resigned from the Session and left the congregation on the 31st March 1884 (Minutes of the Kirk Session of East St Nicholas, 5th March 1883, 5th November 1883 and 31st March 1884).

<sup>93</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 14th February 1883.

<sup>94</sup> *The Glasgow Herald*, 7th November 1901.



## APPENDIX: THE KIRK SESSION OF THE EAST CHURCH IN 1882

The eleven petitioning elders:

(those marked \* resigned shortly after the case)

Admitted in 1857: David Reid, Druggist.

Admitted in 1869: John Alexander, Cabinet Maker.

Admitted in 1872: John Edwards, Merchant;\*

James Meston, Accountant;\*

Alexander Walker, Tobacconist.

Admitted in 1878: William Beattie, Aberdeen Steam Navigation Company.

Alexander Black, Collector, Poor Rates;

John Ingram, Cartwright;\*

Thomas Riddell, Accountant;

John Ross, Silk Mercer;\*

J. R. Smith, Bookseller.\*

The other elders:

Admitted by 1850: William Webster, Baker.

Admitted in 1854: William Yeats, Advocate.

Admitted in 1857: James Aitken, Jun., Shipowner;

William Smith, Architect.

Admitted in 1869: George Donald, Painter;

William Duguid, Iron Merchant;

William Fraser, Surgeon.

Admitted in 1872: Thomas Baird, Upholsterer;

George Carmichael, Bank Agent;

James Gifford, Jun., Carver and Gilder;

Rev. J. W. Legge, School Teacher;

James Tytler, Accountant.

Admitted in 1878: Alexander Adam, Land Surveyor;

A. C. Anderson, Manager;

Alexander Cochran, Advocate;

John Smith, Architect.

William Webster was an elder shortly after the Disruption (MacLaren, *Religion and Social Class*, p. 255); Alexander Cochran, William Duguid, and John Smith were probably members of the same family as those elders of the same name who held office at the time of the Disruption (*ibid.*, pp. 299, 231, 250-1).

Webster, Cochran, Duguid, and John Smith all supported Cooper.

